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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000367

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO CURFEW LIFTED; FM APPEALS FOR DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT

REF: A) MASERU 365 AND PREVIOUS; B) MASERU 355

MASERU 00000367 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Charge d'Affaires a.i. W. Patrick Murphy, CDA
a.i., EXEC, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: To the relief of local residents, Lesotho Police lifted a week-long curfew on June 22. Security forces, however, maintained checkpoints throughout Maseru, leading to the shooting of a government employee. Foreign Minister Tsekoa, meeting with resident diplomats on June 23, dismissed security concerns and took umbrage at the notion of neutrality of the diplomatic community vis-a-vis the country's political impasse. Tsekoa instead asked for support of the "government of the day"

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and appealed for help "to convince the opposition parties that the ballot box has spoken and that they are dirtying the waters (with their efforts to reallocate parliamentary seats)." The GOL's knee-jerk curfew and increasingly pronounced insinuation that the political opposition is to blame for the impasse as well as recent violence could splash cold water on local hopes for dialogue and reconciliation. End Summary.

CURFEW LIFTED

[¶2.](#) (U) Lesotho's Commissioner of Police announced via public radio on the afternoon of June 22 that she had lifted a comprehensive daily curfew that she had imposed one week earlier in response to attacks on senior government and political leaders (ref A). Emboffs confirmed with a Deputy Commissioner of Police that the announcement lifting the curfew was official and effective immediately.

[¶3.](#) (U) Maseru remained relatively quiet and calm the nights of June 22-25, but security officials maintained various checkpoints and roadblocks at locations throughout Maseru. At about midnight on June 22, Lesotho Defence Forces (LDF) personnel at a roadblock in eastern Maseru opened fire on a marked vehicle of the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation, injuring the ministry employee behind the wheel.

DIPLOMATS MEET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

[¶4.](#) (U) On Saturday June 23, representatives of key diplomatic missions met with Foreign Minister Tsekoa prior to his departure for an EU-ACP meeting in Germany and the AU Summit in Ghana. In attendance at the meeting, requested by diplomatic missions to address current security and political dialogue concerns, were

the Ambassadors of Ireland (acting Dean), South Africa, and the European Commission; Charge of the U.S. Embassy; and the UN Resident Coordinator.

15. (SBU) FM Tsekoa, just back from the Prime Minister's state visit to South Africa, began the meeting by thanking diplomatic missions for remaining in Lesotho after the demise of apartheid, when many countries relocated their diplomatic representation to Pretoria. "Your presence helps us to achieve rule of law and to maintain order," he said, "we need you to celebrate our successes and to be present when we regret our failure or instability."

16. (C) Referring to the country's ongoing political impasse, Tsekoa observed that election crises occur across the world --

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"even in the United States or in Europe" -- but "what is a drop in the ocean of a large country equates to roaring thunder in our small country." He said that with the lifting of the curfew the previous evening, the "security situation is stabilizing" but its sustainability would "depend on us in the government, the opposition, and all stakeholders." He added that law enforcement entities "had made some detentions" (NFI) and would continue efforts to seek the perpetrators of the attacks and to confiscate stolen weapons. "We want to return to normalcy," he said. (Comment: In a pull aside after the meeting, Charge gave Tsekoa assurances that there were no signs recent events would

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derail progress on Lesotho's MCC compact. Tsekoa expressed relief, but Charge encouraged GOL dialogue with local stakeholders and greater transparency in responding to security situations. End Comment).

SEEKING SECURITY AND STABILITY

17. (C) Acting Dean Irish Ambassador Paddy Fay said diplomatic missions were concerned as friends of Lesotho that there be no slide back to the tumult and chaos of 1998. "Stability and security are our primary objectives," he said, "to protect our personnel and citizens and to maintain delivery of our assistance programs." Fay emphasized that diplomatic missions had "no wish to interfere" in the domestic political situation and would remain neutral on the unresolved political impasse, but urged that a peaceful resolution be achieved through the

MASERU 00000367 002.2 OF 002

courts and through dialogue. He added that in the absence of GOL statements on recent violence and the curfew, the Basotho public remained in the dark and consequently "the opposition and other ill-formed groups are filling the information void with speculation." Fay told FM Tsekoa that there was therefore a need for the Prime Minister to address the nation.

18. (C) Several of the diplomats echoed the Irish Ambassador's points. The EC High Commissioner and UNRC each expressed concerns about automatic weapon shootings on the night of June 20 at the Minister of Gender's residence and other locations in Maseru West, a central neighborhood with a high concentration of diplomatic missions and personnel (Note: According to Embassy sources, the June 20 incidents involved reckless shooting by drunken and undisciplined LDF soldiers celebrating pay day. End Note). Charge noted that the Deputy Prime Minister, in his meeting with diplomats on June 18 (ref B), had cited serious concerns about security personnel "who want to overthrow the government" and stated that he would make a public announcement later that day on the situation. Five days later, however, neither the DPM nor any senior GOL official had made any public comments.

THE BALLOT BOX HAS SPOKEN

¶9. (C) FM Tsokoa "appealed for calm" from the diplomats. "Anything less than calm," he said, "would concern my government and I would feel weakened," adding that when he was Ambassador to the UK he frequently heard gunfire in the streets of London near his residence. Tsekoa took umbrage at the Irish Ambassador's comments on the neutrality of the diplomatic community, emphasizing that he actually wanted to hear from diplomats that "you are representing countries that agree to work with the government of the day." Observing that the GOL desired to deliver services to the public, Tsekoa asked that diplomatic missions "help us to convince the opposition that the ballot box has spoken and that they are dirtying the waters (with their efforts to reallocate parliamentary seats)."

¶10. (C) Tsekoa acknowledged that the GOL's communications had been extremely poor. "I only heard about the curfew myself when it was originally announced on the radio," he said, adding that he personally regretted that neither the PM nor the DPM had spoken publicly. "I agree that when the chips are down," the FM said, "the leader needs to speak, but I can't tell my head of government how to operate."

¶11. (C) Irish Ambassador Fay replied that, under the circumstances, he felt the diplomatic community had been entirely calm, and he assured the FM that the GOL had the full support of the international community as "the government of the day." He noted that the governing party, the LCD, was another story: "When the LCD is not acting as the GOL, but rather as a partisan party in conflict with other political parties, we must remain neutral." FM Tsekoa said he fully concurred, adding that he expected diplomats to "give a fair hearing to all Basotho, whether opposition or government, that is your job."

¶12. (C) FM Tsekoa concluded that he believed "there had been no coup attempt (in recent weeks), but a coup was probably the ultimate aim of the attackers." He said there had been unlawful efforts to split the military, but "we have thwarted this because the perpetrators recognize that a coup is pointless when the SADC membership clearly wants a stable and democratic Lesotho."

COMMENT: NOT A RECIPE FOR RECONCILIATION

¶13. (C) Tsekoa, a graduate of Amherst College in the United States, is a seasoned diplomat and respected government official, having served former stints as Foreign Minister and Minister of Education. He was relaxed and confident, if not uncharacteristically defiant, at the June 23 meeting with diplomats, considerably more so than at the Deputy Prime Minister's briefing with diplomats on June 18 (ref B), at which Tsekoa was visibly uncomfortable with the DPM's uneven handling

SIPDIS
of security concerns.

¶14. (C) Nonetheless, although Tsekoa is head and shoulders above most of his cabinet colleagues, he curiously demonstrated a lack of understanding, or disregard, of the domestic implications of the GOL's response to attacks on government leaders. The GOL's knee-jerk curfew and increasingly pronounced insinuation that the political opposition is to blame for the impasse as well as recent violence could splash cold water on local hopes for dialogue and reconciliation. End Comment.
MURPHY